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Department of Social Services

PRESS RELEASE

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Changes take effect in Food Stamp program

It is no April fool's joke. Immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for five years as qualified aliens now may qualify for Food Stamp benefits. This change, which took effect on Tuesday, is part of the Farm Bill of 2002.

The Welfare Reform Act of 1996 implemented some major changes, one specific to legal aliens. Prior to 1996, legal aliens were eligible to apply for Food Stamp assistance just like U.S. citizens. With the Welfare Reform Act, legal aliens became ineligible for food stamps until they had worked and paid into the Social Security system for at least 40 quarters. There were some exceptions to the law. Disabled legal immigrants and children under 18 years of age who lived in the U.S. on or before August 22, 1996 remained eligible to apply. Tuesday's Food Stamp program benefit change eliminates the policy that required 40 quarters of work history.

The Farm Bill of 2002 was passed in October 2002 with restoration of benefits happening over the course of a year. The first phase, which restored eligibility to disabled aliens regardless of their date of entry, was effective October 1, 2002.

Phase two took effect Tuesday restoring eligibility to aliens who have lived in the U.S. for five years as a qualified alien. This will eliminate the policy that required 40 quarters of work history.

Finally, in October 2003, children under age 18 will become eligible regardless of their date of entry.

It is important to note that immigrant families must meet the same eligibility criteria (income and assets tests) as U.S. citizens in addition to meeting the requirements that are specific to immigrants.

Undocumented aliens are not eligible for Food Stamp assistance.

For more information, please contact Catawba County Social Services Food Stamp unit at 828-695-5694.

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